

PEOPLE & THINGS

I HEAR from Vienna that it may now be taken as certain that the Vienna State Opera Company will give a short season of Mozart operas in London this autumn; and that these operas will be given, with full theatrical presentation, at the Royal Festival Hall.

When I referred these reports to the Hall itself, I was brought up short by Mr. Bean's invariable modesty; but I find it suspicious, to say the least, that he should have returned last week from Brussels, where the Wiener Staatsoper was then appearing; and I fancy that we shall soon have reason to congratulate him upon a further enlargement of the uses of the Royal Festival Hall.

A Secret Cave

A MIRACULOUS cave, extending over scores of square miles, has been discovered near Krugersdorp, the Transvaal town about thirty miles west of Johannesburg. The cave, a fairyland of stalactites, is traversed by a full-sized river and is said to be so rich in prehistoric human skulls and remains that its whereabouts are being kept secret until it has been investigated by a team of experts headed by the palaeontologist, Professor C. van Riet Lowe, from Witwatersrand University.

The cave is close to the Sterkfontein caves, where in 1936 Dr. Robert Broom discovered the "Missing Link" (*Plesianthropus Transvaalensis*), and the Swartkrans caves where Dr. Broom made further discoveries.

The reasons for the stringent security precautions are sound. At Sterkfontein, stalactites were carried away by farmers, pulverised for their limestone content and used as fertiliser, and a group of sitting skeletons was removed before scientists could examine them.

Success Story

WORLDLY wisdom has a particular fascination for me, and I have been browsing with profit among the combative pages of "Don't Trust to Luck." This small volume (which might have been entitled "Nothing Succeeds like Lord Beaverbrook") is probably the most inspiring thing of its kind since Sir Henry Taylor's classical homilies were published in 1836 under the title of "The Statesman."

With Lord Beaverbrook, as with most famous men, reality differs from legend; and many readers may be surprised by the grave, avuncular tone of his essays on Success, with their sage emphasis upon moderation and humility. But even in that most difficult of forms, the secular sermon, Lord Beaverbrook retains his power to stimulate and to surprise. It is hard to believe that when his birthday comes round on May 25 this zestful invigorator will be 75.

La Madone Du Rolls

THIS, the fiftieth anniversary of the meeting of Mr. Rolls with Mr. Royce, is incidentally being marked by a sharp increase in sales in the United States and Rolls's chief American agent, Mr. J. S. Inskip, has even succeeded in breaking into Broadway by selling a car to Mr. Billy Rose of the famous Diamond Horse-Shoe night club.

A Rolls-Royce is still the most expensive standard motor-car in the world, but some of the romance has gone from the name with the disappearance of those wonderful special bodies with a basket-work finish and silver coach-lamps which used to swan so gracefully through the great shopping centres of the world.

But there is still one such model

By ATTICUS

to be seen on Park Avenue and it is, moreover, equipped with black glass windows which reveal nothing of its owner except an occasional glimpse of a mysterious and very beautiful feminine hand.

I like to think that Mr. Michael Arlen is holding the other.



A Particular Pot

UNTIL quite recently the history of England and the history of English pottery went hand-in-hand, and every national hero was commemorated with a series of objects which contributed either to the dignity or the gaiety of English art.

In our own time this function has largely lapsed; so I was all the more delighted to hear that the Prime Minister was recently presented with the imposing vessel here reproduced. Designed and made by Barbara, Countess of Moray, and painted by Miss Pamela Harris, it is an adaptation of an early eighteenth-century Lambeth posset-pot, and bears upon its other side Sir Winston's Garter arms. Lady Moray is well known for her skill and invention as a potter, and her present creation, so elegant and yet so appropriately massive in its forms, can rank with the earlier objects which inspired it—the tributes to Nelson which Lady Moray admired in the Royal Maritime Museum at Greenwich.

Vie Parisienne

I wonder who represented Scotland Yard on Friday night in response to the beautifully engraved invitation card from the French Commissariat of Police which read as follows:

Monsieur Jean Baylot, Préfet de Police, prie M. de lui faire l'Honneur D'Assister au Vernissage de l'Exposition.

LE NU

A TRAVERS LES AGES
Organisée au profit des Oeuvres Sociales de la Préfecture de Police
—Fondation Louis Lépine—qui aura lieu le Vendredi 14 Mai 1954, de 21 h à minuit, chez Messieurs Bernheim - Jeune, 27 Avenue Matignon, Paris VIIIème.

The Nile Hotel

FEW ex-Servicemen will be sorry to hear that Cairo's Kasr-el-Nil barracks, until 1948 the traditional home of the British Army in Egypt, is soon to make way for the Hilton chain's 400-room Nile Hotel. For the vast yellow and pink pile, facing Gezira Island across the broad, brown river, was out of date long before world war two began—baking in summer and freezing in winter.

Deprived for many years of necessary renovations by a Treasury quick to seize on the political situation as an excuse for delay, it provided several genera-

tions of Other Ranks with the legend of cockroaches so big and powerful as to be known to seize and carry off struggling R.S.M.s for leisurely devourment in shady corners of the sanded cricket field.

A New Elizabethan

THE conduct of the Orichel Downs commission of inquiry by Sir Andrew Clark, Q.C., has been much admired in legal and political circles, but the County of Dorset is ringing with Sir Andrew's name for quite a different reason.

The scene is the dining room of Sir Thomas Salt, High Sheriff of Dorset. The port is circulating and the light of the candles is reflected back a hundredfold from the glittering array of duelling pistols with which the walls are hung. There is respectful but incredulous silence round the table. The eminent Q.C., having modestly revealed some knowledge of these weapons, has just undertaken to prime one of Sir Thomas's pistols with only its ancient cap and blow out the flame of a candle at fifteen paces.

Act Two

THREE beautiful eighteenth-century weapons are taken down from the wall and the caps are produced. The first two shots misfire. Sir Andrew examines the third pistol and calls for a pin to clear the touch-hole. This provides an excuse to invite the ladies in from the drawing room a hairpin is produced, the guests again stand away from the table, the ladies close their ears, BANG, and the candle stands denuded of its flame.

Encouraged by the applause, Sir Andrew then undertakes to cut one inch off a candle and fire the waxen bullet through a two-inch board. The company expresses further incredulity. Sir Thomas says that since no board is available he will be proud to offer his fine mahogany door for the experiment. Sir Andrew expostulates, but the High Sheriff is adamant. A large-bore sixteenth-century flint-lock pistol is produced. Sir Andrew cuts his piece of candle and, ignoring the warnings of the company that he is about to lose a hand, or an arm, or even his face, charges the long barrel with black powder, wads made out of fragments of "The Times" newspaper, and the "bullet."

Act Three

THE guests gather in nervous anticipation in the corners of the room, the servants are warned not to stir from the neighbouring kitchen, and Sir Andrew takes up his stance fifteen paces from the gleaming expanse of mahogany, takes careful aim at its centre and pulls the trigger. There is a POUFF and a flash of fire as the flint ignites the heaped powder in the pan, and, an instant later, a mighty roar followed immediately by a muffled and melodious BONG. Clouds of smoke billow to the ceiling, and the floor is seen to be covered with confettied "Times." There is a rush for the door. Sure enough, a clean half-inch hole has been drilled straight through its centre.

Amid scenes of unrestrained enthusiasm the host takes a pen-knife and engraves the bare facts alongside the hole. Sir Andrew adds his signature followed by the signatures of all those present, and now a circular piece of perspex covers the historic area, and the splendid tale is slowly spreading through the county and beyond.

Postscript

THE melodious BONG? That was caused by the spent candle-end scoring a bull's-eye on the pedestal gong on the far side of the hall.

All these things occurred at about 10 p.m. on Tuesday, April 27 at Shillingstone House, Shillingstone, Dorset.